CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the role feminism plays in the identity of adult, self-identified feminist women. From interviews with 40 university-affiliated women in five geographic locations across the United States, I sought to understand (a) how these women conceptualized identity, (b) how feminism fit into that conceptualization, and (c) how race/ethnicity and sexual orientation interact with feminist identity.

The women in this study conceptualized identity as consisting of multiple elements, organized in one of two ways: a whole with multiple parts and a collection of multiple parts. The first view of identity, a whole with multiple parts, is an integrated identity— each of the multiple identities is related to and interactive with the others. The second view, a collection of multiple parts, is a contextual identity—some of the identities are connected and some are separate, depending on the situation or context in which the individual finds herself. The multiple identities included traditional categories of occupation, relationships, religion, politics, race, and sexual orientation, but also added other areas such as age, socioeconomic class, avocational interests, and feminism. All of these identity areas are not present for every woman; each woman created her identity from a combination of elements unique to her.

The way participants in this study view feminism can be organized thematically in four categories: as a set of values, as a process to make meaning, as a contextual identity, and as an underlying construct. Women who view feminism as a set of values speak of it as a set of beliefs or an ideology that may or may not influence other identity areas. The participants who view feminism as a process to make meaning have either an interconnected or contextual view of feminism, with the added element of seeing feminism as a way to understand, interpret, and make decisions about experiences. Feminism as a contextual identity is connected with some parts of identity but not with all elements. For those whose view of feminism is as an underlying construct, feminism is interconnected and interactive with all of the other identity elements.

Feminism joins race/ethnicity and sexual orientation as identities of difference. Three themes emerged in this area: other, intersections, and privilege. Like race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, feminism is a way that some women see themselves as "other" or different from the societal norm. Feminism intersects with race/ethnicity and sexual orientation as mutually influencing and interconnected. Majority women tend to acknowledge the privilege that their majority status affords them.

The final chapter explores the relationship of these findings with the literature on identity and feminist identity. I then discuss limitations of the study and implications for research. I conclude the chapter by setting my research agenda for continuing the inquiry of this study.

Identity

What is Identity?

Although this research study did not start out to answer the question "What is identity?", I found this question compelling in both how I approached the analysis and how I understood what the participants were telling me about themselves and their feminism. Identity is a term that is sometimes used loosely in research, scholarly, and popular literature, often without a specific definition. The term is treated as if it were axiomatic—self-evident and universally understood. Indeed, I began this research project with the assumption that identity would be defined similarly by all of my research participants. I found this not to be true, leading me to explore more deeply how the participants viewed their own identities on their own terms.

A summary of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this dissertation reveals several ways that the cited researchers define identity:

1. An internal self-definition, expressed as self-image (Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1978).

2. A process of making meaning (Josselson, 1987).

3. A view of self in relation to roles and norms, such as occupational choice and career progression (Erikson, 1959/1980; Levinson et al., 1978), gender role and sexual expression (Waterman, 1993), or relationships with significant others (Gilligan, 1980).

4. An ideology or set of beliefs, including politics and religion (Marcia, 1966) or feminist attitudes (Henley et al., 1998; Williams & Wittig, 1997).

5. Affiliation with a group based on a shared characteristic, such as feminism (Downing & Roush, 1985), race (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1993), or sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994).

All of these definitions have some relation to identity as I have come to understand it from my interviews with the women in this study, but none is complete by itself. I propose the following definition: *adult women's identity is a personal construction that relates multiple roles, relationships, beliefs, and affiliations to form how an individual makes sense of herself and what she holds as most central and important to her.* The following sections explain each of the components of this definition.

Personal Construction

Each woman constructs her own identity. Identity can only be understood for each person individually, taking into account her multiple identities as she has constructed them. Construction also implies the possibility of re-construction of identity—that it could be changed. Erikson (1959/1980), Marcia (1976), and Josselson (1996) acknowledge that

identity is not static, but that it can change over time. Although my interviews did not ask questions about identity development, many participants told me that their identities had changed. This was particularly true for women who came to feminism in mid-life.

Multiple Roles, Relationships, Beliefs, and Affiliations

The traditional elements have a place in identity, but they are not sufficient to define an individual. One cannot know a person just by knowing about any one part of her, it is necessary to look at all parts. Multiple roles include employment and non-employment activities, such as professor, lay minister, or girl scout leader. Relationships include both family relationships —mother, sister, wife, partner—and friendships. Beliefs include feminist attitudes, but also religious beliefs or political stances. Affiliations refers to social groups or classifications with which the individual identifies, based on culture, race, sexual orientation, or personal interest.

Each of these elements influences how the individual woman defines herself; none of them may be viewed in isolation from the others. For example, one woman is not just a mother, she is also a professor and a feminist and a heterosexual and a Catholic and a Chicana. These roles are not important by themselves; what is important is how she sees herself in relation to these roles. What does being a mother mean to her? How important is her role as a professor to how she values herself as a person?

Integration

The multiple roles are interactive in an integrated identity. Each self-defined element interacts in greater or lesser ways with other identity elements. How someone sees herself as a Chicana may influence her religious identity, for example. Identity elements vary in their degree of interaction with each other. In some cases an element of identity, like feminism, can have little influence on other aspects of identity. In the views of identity identified in Chapter Four, the women in this study who see their identity as a whole with multiple parts have a greater degree of integration than the women who see their identity as a collection of multiple parts. This is not meant to be a hierarchy, however, nor is it meant to suggest that integration is a better or higher form of identity.

Makes Sense of Herself

This phrase emphasizes the importance of an internal frame of reference in identity. Identity is an individual's view of herself—how she sees herself as a person, who she believes she is. Identity is self-defined, not a label applied by others.

Holds as Most Central

This phrase refers to the salience of different identities. For example, occupation may be the most important element in one woman's identity and relationships may not be as central to her. Again the critical element is what the individual considers to be most important to her, not a label assigned externally. This is not to suggest, however, that there is a singular center or core identity. Jones and McEwen (2000), for example,

developed a model of multiple identities that holds personal attributes and personal characteristics at its core. By these, they mean such things as being "intelligent, kind, a good friend, compassionate, [or] independent" (p. 409). I consider these to be personality traits rather than identity as I have defined it. Regardless, the idea of multiple identities that the individual holds as most important to her is an integral concept in my definition of identity.

This definition differs from other definitions because of its focus on self-identification. Identity is an individualized construct, not one applied externally. External labels such as feminist, African American, or lesbian are only relevant to the extent that the individual woman claims them as part of her. To be part of her identity, she must consciously accept the element and integrate that aspect of herself with the other parts of her identity.

At the heart of this definition is the idea that identity is not a singular phenomenon. Each person has multiple identities that must be considered in conjunction with each other. Identities are overlapping and mutually influencing. To understand someone's identity, the whole person must be taken onto account rather than only one element of that person.

This is a postmodern view of identity. Early theories of identity were based on modernist assumptions. Modernism holds that knowledge is built from objective, rational study discerned by scientific methods (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Marcia's (1966) study of identity statuses is an example of a modernist approach in that he used standardized measures to collect data, drawing conclusions about the nature of identity based on statistical significance. A postmodern research paradigm rejects modernist assumptions of truth, holding that knowledge is socially constructed and that multiple understandings of truth exist (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). The postmodern view is evidenced in my definition of identity by its emphasis on multiplicity, fluidity, and individual construction.

Relation to Previous Literature

Identity

Previous identity theory has been developed and researched primarily on college-aged students. Erikson (1968) said that identity is an adolescent phenomenon, that resolving the identity crisis occurs in adolescence. Even if that is true, the college years are the beginning of the adult phase, so it is important to know how identity continues to be resolved throughout the lifespan. Neither Erikson nor those researchers who have based their work on Erikson, such as Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987; 1996), claim that identity is stable, that it is fixed and unchangeable. However, Marcia did not talk adequately about the way that identity changes or fully address the fluid, changing nature of identity. Josselson (1996) addressed the revision of identity; further exploration of this would enhance the understanding of how identity changes.

Erikson wrote as if the development of identity were an invariant sequence and the resolution were part of a hierarchical progression throughout the lifespan. Both Marcia and Josselson agreed that identity can be revisited and that the statuses by which people

can be identified during college are not necessarily the same as they experience in adult life. Josselson's (1996) longitudinal study has spanned more than 20 years and has found definite changes in the way that people define themselves, such that they can no longer be categorized in the same statuses. Josselson has been very clear in saying that there are no adequate models of adult identity development. This is a way that this study makes a significant contribution to that literature.

Josselson (1996) has acknowledged that identity is self-defined and is revised throughout the lifespan. She says that women construct their identities and that the classification of identity that was assigned during the college interview is not the same as in later life. She did not propose a new classification system, though, saying that there are no established measures of adult identity after college. This points to the idea that greater understanding of adult identity is needed, as shown in both Josselson's work and my research.

As Erikson's definition of identity was operationalized by Marcia (1966), it became entangled with sociocultural assumptions. Occupation as the primary basis for identity was based on an assumption that work is the central task of masculine adulthood. A career orientation was thought to be what "makes a man." Men were to be providers— their value (and therefore self worth) was connected to how successful they were at that role. This definition does not hold up today with the changing constructions of gender roles.

Later research (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993) expanded the foundations of identity to occupation, politics, religion, and (for women) attitudes about sexual behavior, later to be revised to include gender role attitudes and beliefs about sexual expression. These areas as indicators of identity are problematic in several ways.

1. Occupation continues to be advanced as the primary source of self-definition—"what I do is who I am." This is a masculinist assumption based on a social construction of gendered roles.

2. A supposition that ideology is the same as identity prevails—"what I believe is who I am." Ideology may inform identity, but they are not synonymous.

3. Assessing identity in women through sexual attitudes is an assumption about women's "biological destiny" as keepers of sexual standards and "bearers of life." Women have no more responsibility for sexual standards than men do; therefore defining women's identity through their attitudes about premarital intercourse (Marcia & Friedman, 1970) reinforces the association of women with sexuality and reproduction while downplaying more constructive and responsible roles and positions outside of the home.

Others have talked about other elements of identity for women, including relationships (Gilligan, 1980) and the combination of work and family (Giele, 1993). Josselson has framed identity as competence and connection that are expressed in multiple areas. The participants in my study identified their relationships with others, including family,

friends, and colleagues, as important in their identities. Relationships were not always the most important element for my participants, however, challenging the widely-held notion that women primarily define themselves by connection.

A recent identity model (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000) describes identity as consisting of multiple elements. This model was based on research with college women. My study supports the idea that women have multiple identities that must be considered together. It provides further evidence that multiple identities are important for adult women.

Feminist Identity

The central model of feminist identity development was proposed by Downing and Roush (1985) and operationalized in instruments constructed by Bargad and Hyde (1991) and Rickard (1987). This model is described in Chapter Two. My findings challenge the Downing and Roush model in four areas: (a) the difference between consciousness and identity; (b) the definition of feminism; (c) interactions of multiple identities; and (d) the relationship between identity and activism.

Consciousness and Identity

The Downing and Roush (1985) scheme seems to be based on a model of feminist consciousness or values rather than identity as I have defined it. The focus of the Downing and Roush model is the degree to which women are aware of gender roles and hold positive beliefs about women rather than how they see themselves. This is again an example of the many ways that identity is used to mean many different concepts. Feminist consciousness is a more accurate descriptor than feminist identity for the Downing and Roush model.

Reframing the model as consciousness is consistent with current research on White racial awareness that frames the issue as White racial consciousness rather than White racial identity (Mueller & Pope, 2001; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). In the Rowe et al. (1994) model, White racial consciousness refers to "the attitudes held by Whites about the significance of being White" (Mueller & Pope, 2001, p. 134). To extrapolate this to Downing and Roush, their model of feminist identity could be described as the attitudes held by women about the significance of being a woman. Each of the stages of the Downing and Roush model is described in terms of how women view gender roles, with the ultimate goal of transcending traditional gender roles to make choices based on their individual characteristics. The model does not address how the women view their own identity as a feminist and how that interacts with other aspects of who they are, a critical element of my findings.

Definition of Feminism

Implicit in the Downing and Roush (1985) model is a liberal definition of feminism, which is also reflected in the instruments developed to measure the model, the Feminist Identity Development Scale (Bargad & Hyde, 1991) and the Feminist Identity Scale (FIS) (Rickard, 1987). For example, Rickard's validation of the FIS was based on agreement with gender-defined dating behaviors such as initiating or paying for dates. Whether someone is classified as having a higher level of feminist identity in this case, then, depends on whether her definition of feminism agrees with the inherent definition of the model.

My findings suggest that the particular definition of feminism is not critical in determining the interconnection of feminism and other identity elements. Each participant in my study defined feminism for herself and the definitions varied considerably among participants. The important element is the way that the individual uses her own definition of feminism to make sense of how she defines herself. The individualized definitions of feminism indicate a high degree of reflexivity among the participants who have constructed their own definitions to fit themselves.

That there were multiple definitions of feminism underscores that feminism is highly individualized and not reducible to a single phrase or slogan. There was not a uniform sense of affiliation with a collective movement among the participants in this study that I expected based on social identity theory. A social identity analysis of feminism advances the idea that calling oneself a feminist is based on identification with a group that has common goals (Williams & Wittig, 1997). The multiple definitions of feminism belie the assumption that feminists have a common vision of feminism or that they are active in the "feminist movement." Indeed, among the participants in this study, there is no notion of a common collective movement as might have characterized feminism in the 1960s or 1970s. This finding is particularly interesting given that the sample included both academics and those, such as women's center directors, whose agenda would be assumed to be more overtly activist.

Multiple Identities

Downing and Roush (1985) did not address other influences on identity, such as race, sexual orientation, or the traditional identity areas of occupation, relationships, religion, and politics. My findings indicate that the elements of identity are mutually influencing, therefore no model of identity can exclude the multiple nature of identity. An identity model must take multiple identities into account. The Downing and Roush model does not do this.

Identity and Activism

The Downing and Roush (1985) model includes active commitment as the highest stage of feminist identity. This is characterized as an activist stance of working to effect social change (Downing & Roush, 1985). My findings did not reveal a link between activism

and feminist identity. Many of the participants did include activism in their definitions of feminism, but this did not distinguish the participants by category of feminism. Several of the women in the underlying construct category, for example, do not consider themselves activists; however, the integration of their feminism is clear in all of their multiple identities.

Regardless of the level of activism expressed, the key element is the degree to which feminism is integrated into identity, as the participants define it for themselves. This may be a redefinition of "active commitment" in that feminism actively affects all the other aspects of identity. The commitment does not have to be expressed as activism, but rather as a consistency in how feminism is expressed throughout identity as it is defined by the individual. Activism, therefore, cannot be used as a litmus test for who is a feminist and who is not, as some feminists would like to do. A feminist, in my view, is someone who calls herself a feminist. The way that she expresses that may differ from other feminists; that does not have any influence on whether she is a feminist or how she identifies herself.

Summary

This study adds to the previous literature about identity and feminist identity in three ways. First, it expands the knowledge about adult women's identity by proposing a definition that takes into account the multiple identities that women have. This is a postmodern view, eschewing the notion that identity is a singular construct defined by a personal core. Rather, my view of identity is as multiple elements that interact with each other on different levels or in different contexts.

Second, my findings expand the limited areas by which identity has been traditionally defined. Although occupation, relationships, politics, religion, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation were confirmed as elements of identity, they do not encompass all of the elements by which the women in this study defined themselves. Other identifiers included such things as age, avocational interests, physical appearance, and socioeconomic class status. It was clear in my interviews that the participants needed to define their own identity areas and personalize them to her. Any research on identity must allow for women to define their own categories.

Third, this study's findings challenge the Downing and Roush (1985) model as the principal model of feminist identity. The Downing and Roush model focuses on feminist consciousness rather than identity; it employs a singular, liberal definition of feminism; it ignores multiple identities and their interactions; and it hinges its highest achievement on activist participation. Each of these assumptions of the Downing and Roush model are contradicted by the findings of my research. I have proposed a model of feminist identity that is consistent with my definition of identity. I have imposed no definition of feminism but rather use the definitions posed by the participants for themselves. The central tenet of my model is that self-identified feminists have multiple identities, including feminism, and that each of these identities is interactive to greater or lesser degrees with the other

identities. One element of identity cannot be looked at in isolation; all elements must be examined to understand the whole person. Finally, the level of activism is not related to the category of feminism.

My model of feminist identity is a new way of looking at the relationship of one element of identity with other multiple elements. In reflecting on the process of writing this dissertation, I am struck that my analysis and conclusions turn out to be less about feminism than about identity. In particular I have challenged the way that identity has traditionally been measured and the use of identity scales with fixed categories. My study is grounded in feminism and I can only understand the results in the context of feminism, but rather than being about feminism, I have learned more about how a particular element is part of an identity. This has significant implications for other identity research—each of the other identity elements may be understood in terms of their degree of interconnection with other identity elements. This is a very different approach from the isolating way that identity elements have been studied.

The importance of this research is in revising the way that adult identity is understood. In particular, this study challenges the notion that identity is a singular, core construct based on traditional elements. Individuals must be allowed to identify the elements that make up their own identities. The results of this study also suggest that multiple identities, including race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, are mutually influencing and interconnected rather than independent or singular. Identity is constructed of multiple elements that must be examined together to understand the individual's own definition of self.

Limitations

As in any research study, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. The major limitations in this study relate to the characteristics of the participants and the interview method.

Participants

The study sample does not represent a wide range of participants. By interviewing only those who self-identify as feminists, I have included only women who have achieved a certain clarity about their feminism. Because feminism is viewed negatively by many people, for someone to accept that as an identity she is likely to accept a view of herself as different from other women. Feminism is an accepting of the label of other, partly because it gives feminists a conceptual orientation to understand their otherness.

This is an elite population. The participants are homogeneous in education and employment. Most of them have at least a master's degree; all have at least a bachelor's degree. There was a higher level of self-reflexivity and articulateness than would be expected among women in general. This was an advantage to me as a researcher, making

it easier to do the research. All of the participants are employed at universities. The university environment may be more accepting of feminist beliefs and more tolerant of difference than other environments such as corporate, government, military, or industry settings. Because they were identified by women's center directors, the participants probably had some level of involvement in a feminist community. Women in other settings may not have comparable opportunities to participate in a feminist community.

Although I was purposeful in trying to get a racially diverse sample, I was not able to reach my goal of 50% women of color, achieving instead only 30%. One reason for this may have been the proportion of women of color at the universities I visited. It is possible that my sample was representative of the actual number of women of color at those universities. Another reason may have been the reluctance of some women of color to use the labels "feminist" or "womanist." Several of the women's center directors who referred participants indicated that they had difficulty identifying women of color who call themselves feminists. The reasons for this would make an interesting research project in itself.

Interview Method

Since people will often present themselves positively in interviews (Merriam, 1998), I may not have been able to get the widest possible range of responses to my questions. Participants are unlikely to offer information that portrays them in a negative light. In addition, the participants were eager to be helpful to me and my research and therefore may have responded as they believed I wanted them to. Many women jumped straight to talking about feminism when I asked questions about their identity in general. That could have been because feminism is so strongly linked to their identity or it could have been because they thought that was what I wanted to know.

A final caveat relates to my skills as an interviewer. Although I attempted to be consistent across the interviews, there were variations in what I chose to follow up on. As the week of interviews went on, I found my energy lagging and my follow up questions more rare. Another area I found difficult to negotiate in interviews was the level of personal sharing about myself. I tried to limit my reactions to the participants' stories, fearing that I may unduly influence the direction of the interview. In many cases I did have a personal connection to something that the participant talked about, although I would usually wait until near the end of the interview to let her know how I connected to something she said. I tried to walk a fine line between establishing rapport and building trust and "leading" the interview. I am sure that this was more successful in some cases than in others.

Implications

Implications for Research

The major implication of this study is a reshaping of how identity research is conducted. In particular, I am challenging the idea of a core identity and proposing instead that the focus be on multiple identities. This suggests that broad-ranging questions are required to get a range of what multiple areas people define as their own identities. The established categories may not be meaningful to an individual's identity, while other areas may be. Identity research must allow for the possibility of self-naming.

The results of this study relate not only to feminist identity scales, but also have implications for research using other identity scales in general. In particular, the finding that multiple identities are mutually influencing challenges the practice of looking at any identity area in isolation. Scales that focus on only one element of identity without taking into account the interactions with other elements are inadequate to assess identity fully. This suggests profound changes in racial identity or sexual orientation identity research, based on the supposition that the methodology of this study could be used to find out if racial identity interacts with other identity elements in the same way that feminism does. If similar findings about the multiple interactions of racial identity with other identity areas occur, it would suggest that each of the identity areas must be researched in combination rather than in isolation. The same supposition can be applied to sexual orientation identity or any of the other traditional identity areas.

Need for Further Research

This study leaves several unanswered questions to be explored in further research. First, how do multiple identities affect identity development? Is the integration of identity a developmental process? My study provides no evidence of a developmental process nor of stages or statuses as they have been described by Marcia (1966; 1976) and Josselson (1987; 1996). One reason for this is the snapshot nature of my interview questions: I asked the women I interviewed to describe how they see themselves at the present rather than how their sense if identity has changed over time.

Josselson (1996) identified revision as a central characteristic of adult women's identity development, meaning that women's identity changes over the course of their lives. Expanding on the notion of revision, the changing nature of multiple identities, particularly in the areas of racial identity, sexual orientation identity, and feminist identity and their interactions, is a topic needing further exploration.

Is there a developmental nature to feminism, as proposed by Downing and Roush (1985)? I have proposed a model of four categories of feminism in identity, but have no evidence that this is a developmental model. A developmental process implies hierarchy and that particular events or stages must precede further progression. My model of feminist

identity is not intended to be hierarchical. A follow-up study would be required to test this assumption and determine if there are any systematic patterns to movement among categories of feminism.

A parallel study would explore the development of feminist identity. Downing and Roush (1985) propose that a critical event or series of events leads to a "revelation" about gender issues. Although my interviews did include a question about how feminism developed, further exploration or analysis is required to determine more completely if there are patterns of feminist identity development.

This research focused on adult women rather than traditional-aged college students who are still in the process of forming identity. Further study is needed to look at students who are beginning to explore issues of feminism and how feminism relates to other aspects of their developing identity.

Finally, this study purposefully ignored the question of feminist men's identity. There are many men who call themselves feminist or who support feminist principles. Are feminist men any different from feminist women? Do men experience feminism in the same way as women? Similarly, one might wonder how adult men conceptualize their own identities—do men have the same experience of multiple identities as women do? Is this expressed differently in men?

My Research Agenda

One of my goals in choosing this topic for my research study was to establish a continuing research agenda. I have found that my own interest has been captivated by the exploration of multiple identities in adult women. I have proposed a definition of adult women's identity that requires further study and refinement. I intend to investigate further identity as it is constructed by adult women beyond the college years, with a particular focus on refining a model of identity that encompasses multiple identity areas.

In addition, I am interested in looking more at the intersections of identities of difference. Rather than assuming that there are hierarchies of identity for people of color or gay men and lesbians, further research will clarify the intersections of identities. Finally, the idea of privilege as it relates to feminism is a topic worthy of further study and will be a part of my agenda.

Conclusion

My interest in this research was sparked by my concurrent study of women's identity models and feminist theory; I wondered how the two might fit together to describe the place of feminism in identity for women who claim the label "feminist." I also claim that label and so this research took on a degree of personal interest for me as I wondered whether being a feminist was strictly an ideology or if it affected more of my sense of self. I have been involved in feminist communities for 15 years, during which I have worked with activists and non-activists, academics and community organizers. I have

taught in women's studies and worked in women's centers. Clearly, I have a personal interest in this topic as I have observed both my own experience with feminism and others' experiences. I believed that feminism played much more of a role in my life and others' lives than just a belief in gender equality, that it affected more of how we placed ourselves in the world.

I started this study with the unquestioning assumption presented by most identity models that there is a core of identity and that identity is developmental and hierarchical. I wondered how feminism fit within the established models. In the process of doing this research, my position has changed dramatically. I now see identity in a very different way than traditional theory. Whereas traditional identity theory is based on modernist notions of reality, my view has shifted to a postmodern standpoint. Reality is individually constructed and identity is an individual manifestation of a personal truth.

Identity is composed of multiple elements, each constructed by the individual and each having different levels of importance or salience. Feminism is one of the multiple elements for the women in this study, but it is not the only element of any of these women's identities. The role of feminism in identity is best understood by determining the extent to which feminism interacts with or connects with all of the multiple elements that define the self. Because identity is a phenomenon of multiples, no one element can be looked at in isolation. The interconnections of all identity elements must be considered when understanding identity. This has implications for the way that identity is theorized and studied. No single element defines identity—not feminism, nor race, nor sexual orientation. Identity must be studied as it relates to multiple components of the self.